Lexical Features and Variations of Sri Lankan English in Sri Lankan Internet Memes

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The emergence and validation of New Englishes is often assessed within the framework of the 'Dynamic Model of the Evolution of New Englishes' developed by Edgar Schneider (2003; 2007) in which New Englishes are formed by undergoing a fundamental uniform process of several stages. However, while scholars continue to grapple with concerns regarding recognition and acceptance of Sri Lankan English (SLE) as a variety, it is interesting to examine the possible expansion of SLE into the virtual arena. The study of the spread of SLE into the online forum is of paramount significance within a World Englishes paradigm given the current context of globalisation which provides ample opportunity for the enrichment of varieties through language contact. Therefore this research examines the extension of lexical features and variations of SLE into the online forum through a study of Sri Lankan internet memes. This study also explores the level of acceptance and attitudes of users of SLE towards the use of SLE in Sri Lankan internet memes. The research employs both a qualitative and quantitative approach as is evident in the two phases in which the study is carried out. The first step of the research is to identify and categorise a sample of 100 Sri Lankan internet memes on Facebook (a popular online social networking site) according to the most frequently used lexical features and variations of SLE. Thereafter, in the second phase a questionnaire is distributed among 30 undergraduates who own Facebook profiles and study English as a subject at the University of Sri Jayewardenepura, the University of Colombo and the University of Kelaniya. The study then examines the limitations of Schneider's model (2003; 2007) based on the possibility that SLE may have circumvented stages of the model in developing into a variety which not only extends to the online platform but is also gradually gaining acceptance within the virtual sphere.

Key words: new Englishes, Sri Lankan English, Sri Lankan internet memes, world Englishes